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## CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

### IS THERE AN INTELLECTUAL CONTENT IN PHILOSOPHY?

[It is with a sense of personal loss that we here chronicle the death of the author of this article, the Rev. Dr. James G. Townsend, of Jamestown, New York, on June 27, 1917. He was born in Pittsburgh in 1839, and once said that he had taken care of himself since he was thirteen, when he lost father, brother, sister and uncle within three days in the plague of cholera which swept Buffalo where the family then lived. He was educated at Oberlin and Allegheny College, working his way through. He enlisted in 1862, and in the battle of Perryville had his left arm so badly crushed that he was never again able to lift his left hand. After his discharge he entered the Methodist ministry where he continued for eighteen years, but then went to Jamestown to found the Independent Congregational Church (now the Unitarian) because he no longer felt in harmony with the Methodist theology and philosophy of life. Four years of active ministry there were followed by a severe illness extending over several years, after which Dr. Townsend founded the First Unitarian Church at Pittsburgh. He spent the last seventeen years of his life in Jamestown, where he kept up his intellectual interests through correspondence with literary friends and contributions to liberal periodicals. The "gospel of beauty" as a moral and educational force was the message of his latest years.—Ed.]

Is there an intellectual content in philosophy? Is there a solid, immutable basis for a metaphysic? Can philosophy give us something real, widen the empire of thought? Can philosophy answer any of those questions which are of supreme importance? For example, can philosophy tell us truths about the subsistence of the universe; truths about this mysterious human soul (whether or not the soul, conscious and individual, survives death); truths about God (for if God be a reality there must be truths about Him); and whether or not this universe is "moving to a good end"?

Miss Mary W. Calkins, in her recent *History of Philosophy*, says "that the study of metaphysics holds out no promise of definite results." She constantly iterates that philosophy "gives us nothing." Yet despite this denial she asserts that philosophy can tell us whether the ultimate reality "is one or many, spirit or matter." But one wonders why, if philosophy can go this far, it cannot go farther.

Schiller says: "Philosophy makes a difference." May not, then, that "difference" be expressed? It is well for us to be modest, to cry out "*Ignoramus*," to admit our knowledge is but a single leaf, plucked from an interminable forest. But must we yield to those agnostics who cry out "*Ignorabimus*," who aver that we have now gone so far that the last word has been said? Is our passion for the highest truth to be expended in a pursuit that reaches no goal, positive or negative?

Prof. William James, in one of his lectures, said: "In this very university (Harvard) I have heard more than one teacher affirm that 'all the fundamental conceptions of truth have already been discovered by science.'" And Professor James said that to make statements of this kind showed a "lack of imagination," in view of the fact that new conceptions have arisen and new problems have been formulated in our generation. And he intimated that a solution of these problems is not impossible.

But it will be said, if the stupendous labors of the great intellects in the long past, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Calvin, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Hume, Mill, Spencer, have brought us nothing, if their strong hands have not been able to lift a single inch that veil of impenetrable mystery which hangs over all, why should we expect to be more successful? There are the ultimate enigmas of existence and there they will remain.

This puts the case very strongly, but is it entirely true? Did not Darwin throw light upon the problem of creation, give us a real advance? And certainly we have, what the thinkers in the past did not have, a wealth of scientific facts and the perfecting of the scientific method.

But it may help us to define, in the beginning of this inquiry, what philosophy is. It is often said that philosophy means to discriminate accurately, to avoid fallacies, collect true premises and deduce just inferences, but I should rather call this logic, not phi-

losophy. Nor would I say it was the province of philosophy to describe phenomena and the facts of experience as exactly, as simply and as completely as possible,—that is science, not philosophy.

In a general way I should say it is the business of philosophy to reveal to us reality, the essential truth, the nature of the universe, the meaning of human life. The precocious young Novalis said that philosophy was “homesickness, a desire to be at home everywhere in the universe.” This is certainly fine. At another time he said: “Philosophy bakes no bread, but it has given us God, freedom and immortality.” While Novalis had gone too far in assuming that philosophy had solved those great intellectual or metaphysical problems, “God, freedom and immortality,” he was not mistaken in the mission of philosophy. It is its province to give us a solution of these riddles of our existence or to throw a great light upon them.

Sir Oliver Lodge, a most cautious thinker, says: “A fair comprehension of the nature of life, and the way it is able to interact with matter, must surely be within our human grasp.” But if human intelligence shall pass that mysterious realm which has so long divided life and matter, may not some brave thinker cross the boundary between the visible and invisible worlds and prove that the search for reality is the search for God, is a legitimate search, and that the soul evolved and educated at so much cost, shall not be thrown away at death as so much rubbish? Is it not arrogance, is it not ignorance to say that nothing more is possible to philosophy?

God, freedom and immortality may be possible to a courageous philosophy, with our more exact knowledge of the laws of evolution, and of biology. To set up a fence beyond which thought can never cross is the mark of a commonplace, a timid nature. Has not this fecund universe, which has so much for the hand, for the eye, for the ear, for the heart, something for the mind? Is it not presumption to say that the immense horizons of knowledge, hitherto unknown, can never be opened up?

It will be said in reply to my view of a real intellectual content in philosophy, the assertion of the possibility of arriving at a definite goal in thought, that modern philosophy is distinguished by the emphasis it places upon the “relative” spirit above the “absolute.” Modern philosophy says nothing is known or can be rightly known except relatively, or approximately. The sciences of observation, in showing how types of life merge in each other in changes infinitely delicate, have brought about this hesitation. The

faculty for truth is recognized as a power of delineating and putting upon canvas the most delicate and ephemeral shades of thought.

There is a new theory of the intimacy, the relationship of mind and matter, good and bad, freedom and necessity. Hard and technical, or churchly, moralities are giving way to simpler, more charitable views, a recognition of those inevitable strands woven by necessity in our complex lives. Man, in body, mind and soul, is swayed by forces of his present environment, also by influences of heredity and by instincts which strike their roots in the soil of an interminable past. Millions of pulses beat in his mysteriously complex nature.

Now I have no quarrel with this "relative" spirit, no desire to "apprehend the absolute," in those realms in which hard and fast lines are impossible. But I maintain, while recognizing the value of the "relative" spirit, that some things may be exactly and absolutely known. For example, that, conditions being the same, there will always be a certain color and curve to the rose-leaf; that every touch of the world of form, color, and feeling brings to us some contribution, if only we are ready to regard it; that it may not be able to tell what beauty is, but that it ever abides for the delight and refreshment of the human spirit.

The new philosophy may not be able to tell us what the body is, or what the soul is, but it may tell us absolutely that the soul abides after the body has crumbled in death.

The new philosophy may not tell us of the mystery of the being of God, but it may tell us that He cares for the things for which we care, that he hears our human call, and is guiding the world toward happiness and goodness, as James said so bravely.

In this attitude of the new philosophy, assuming that in some lines it may be possible to apprehend absolute truth, it follows the old Greek and Roman teachers like Socrates and Zeno and Seneca, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. These teachers sought to elevate men, not by conversion, an appeal to the feelings making a change of will ("for the will they thought was good"), but by education, by the impartation of truth, familiarity with lofty ideals. They said "that to know the truth was to do it," and they were right; for in the end, if you elevate men intellectually, you elevate them morally.

The widening of knowledge, constant association with noble and beautiful ideas, affect character. It is said in reply: "Coleridge

talked like an angel, and did nothing." And men may, in the midst of many opportunities, remain ignorant ; but generally, when knowledge is received, when the mind really moves, there is a moral elevation, a higher civilization is created.

In a thoughtful paper entitled "Civilization in Danger," in the latest *Hibbert Journal*, René L. Gérard seems to contend for views directly opposed to those I have been defending. He says "that to believe that philosophic or religious doctrines create morals or civilization is a seductive and fatal error." He maintains that it is not because a people possess noble beliefs, broad and generous ideas, that it is healthy and happy, but rather that, being healthy and happy, it adopts or invents noble beliefs and generous ideas. And further he affirms that a people, by instinct, unconsciously (here he follows Bergson), will draw upon the vast moral and intellectual acquisitions of the past, the rich experience of all the ages, for the beliefs and ideas they need.

There is a profound truth in these suggestions, but is it the whole truth? Professor Gérard admits that noble beliefs and great thoughts are absolutely necessary, that they assure the survival of a people. And he affirms that a healthy people will adopt these ideas "instinctively, unconsciously." They will draw them from the intellectual and spiritual acquisitions of the past, the accumulated experience of the ages. But are not these acquisitions, the great and universal "acceptances" or beliefs, largely the fruit of the gigantic toil of the mighty thinkers of the past, like Isaiah, Socrates, Jesus, Paul, St. Augustine, Luther?

Professor Gérard contends that when the vital instinct of a people is healthy and vigorous it readily suggests to the people the religious and philosophic doctrines it needs to assure its survival. Let us see if this be so. I will take the same illustration that Professor Gérard uses. The barbarians who destroyed the Roman Empire were a people in whom the vital instinct was pure and strong. They were uneducated, but they adopted Christianity, a new religion. And this new religion, with its ideas of brotherhood and forgiveness, was distinctly opposed to their religious ideas of conquest and cruelty. But in receiving or adopting this new religion they were impressed, educated, elevated, (for the Christian missionaries came with the Bible in one hand "and Virgil in the other").

They ascended to a higher level of morals and civilization.

These were the ideas they needed. But if there had been no Christianity, no new religion, no Virgil, would they have invented these ideas, as Professor Gérard says they would? Ideas and beliefs do not grow on the bushes. Is it not most probable that if these new ideas had not been ready for their adoption the barbarians would have remained at the same low level? Without these ideas and teachers there could have been no progress.

Professor Bergson says that the instinct of the hymenoptera is superior to the intellect of man. Can such a statement be taken seriously? Compare the work of the ants and bees with the proud achievements of the human reason. If instinct is the appropriate organ for apprehending reality, the discovery of truth, why should it be given in such measure to ants and bees, which care not to exercise it, whose range of freedom is so small? How comes it that man, who has a passion for the discovery of truth, has so little of this divine faculty of instinct, the truth-discovering faculty (I mean of course the hard and fast lines of instinct)? Can Bergson or Gérard explain this paradox?

A healthy, vigorous people will have constantly new material, intellectual and spiritual wants or necessities. There must be, then, new and fertile philosophic ideas crystallizing into religious beliefs and ideals. And the sure proof of vitality in a people is the adapting of these new ideas to its new physical, intellectual and spiritual wants.

But unconscious instinct cannot supply these ideas and ideals. Here surely is the inevitable task of the thinker. Professor Gérard even admits that "the role of the conscious reason is, in spite of all, the higher role." We need the inspiration of instinct, of feeling, at times, but we must not forget that the most perfect thing, the most indispensable evolved on this planet is the human intellect.

And when M. Bergson affirms that the sphere of the intellect is "matter" and Professor James, following him, says that its province is "mere surfaces," it seems to me a discrediting of that great faculty which rose to its fulness in Socrates, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, Pascal, Newton, Darwin. Is not the intellect a metaphysical faculty? And are not its problems metaphysical as well as physical, depths as well as "surfaces"? Show me great art, great music, great poetry, great sculpture that has not the intellectual, the metaphysical strand. Are not the Apollo Belvedere, the Divine Comedy, the Mona Lisa, the C Minor Sonata as well as Newton's laws, in part at least,

the fruit of intellect? Draw out the intellectual threads, and would you not destroy the integrity of the whole garment?

I think it will be conceded that religion will take a great step forward if philosophy shall touch the ground of reality, if it shall find a true answer to some of those questions which ever press upon the human spirit; if it shall rise above a mere rephrasing of its attitude to a consciousness of our mental demands.

I maintain it is not the function of religion to teach any theory of the world, any truth. This does not mean that truth is indifferent in religion, for that would imply that education and science are valueless. Ignorance makes for poverty and vice. But there is no coming to independent truth or knowledge, truths about *real things*, through a revelation from within, through intuition. Truth is attained only by observation, experiment, analysis, search, the most patient and exact generalization. Man's religion is of the imagination and the heart, but from his *intellect* he receives his truth, from the intellect the heart receives its *light*. Truth is ever a matter of discovery, of science, of philosophy; religion a matter of feeling.

There are our feelings, our common reactions, it will be said, the great beliefs, the universal "acceptances." But our feelings and our instincts, in the end, must wait upon our intelligence. Whenever Christianity ceases to hold the people intellectually, it will cease to hold their hearts. Mr. Balfour has shown, with fine scorn, the cowardice of those who would stand for the dogmas of Christianity, not because they believed they were true, but because to retain them would be better for the morals of the people. That is to say, they would retain Christianity for policy's sake. These men forget that when the more intelligent lose their faith, the multitude will surely, in the end, lose their faith also.

It is not the province of philosophy (no one will say) to strengthen the gross materialism so transcendent about us unless it shall have been first shown true by science. But the tendency of the thought of our greatest men of science is away from the material hypothesis. They no longer believe religion to be a cunning fable devised by king and priest to be an instrument with which they might control the people. Religion is a mighty force and has its roots deep down among the primitive instincts and feelings of the human race. It will be a sad day for humanity when religion shall have become superannuated.

There must be, as Professor Gérard says, the healthy and



beautiful body. There must be intellectual vigor. But there must be, if a people shall endure, the material for intellectual nutriment. There are to-day new intellectual and spiritual wants. There must be new and fertile ideas which may crystallize into new religious beliefs and ideals. To furnish these ideas and ideals is the inevitable task of the poet, the artist and the philosopher.

While Professor Bergson has said many things derogatory of the human intellect, and a lot of nonsense about the original power of the intuitions which we have now lost, he has said many brave words for philosophy. He has made the vital suggestion (which, so far as I have seen, seems to have been unnoticed) that philosophy pursuing certain lines of facts all converging on the same point "may give an accumulation of probabilities which will gradually approximate scientific certainty."

Well, what greater certainty can we ask? And is not the human intellect, with its dogged slave, Observation, its angel-attendant Imagination, practically infinite? May not that intellect which sweeps over infinite time and space, which holds in its hand, like a flower, the whole stellar universe, solve at least some of those problems which are the very cause of philosophy's existence?

Why should we deny the final intelligibility of the universe? Why may not philosophy pass over the threshold of speculation into the domain of actual knowledge? Why may there not be a definite conquest by philosophy as well as by science? Who can limit what philosophy may do when squarely facing the supreme problems and not frittered away, as Bergson says, "upon a host of special problem in psychology, in morals, in logic."

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#### THE FALLACY IN MR. H. G. WELLS'S "NEW RELIGION."

In his book, *God the Invisible King*, which hails the appearance of a "new religion," Mr. H. G. Wells proclaims himself the spokesman of his age, the "scribe to the spirit of his generation."<sup>1</sup> If he claims to speak for the scientists as well as for the less enlightened portions of society, his conclusions are startling, to say the least,

<sup>1</sup> *God the Invisible King*, p. 171.